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September - October 2008 Newsletter

Talent Management: Part 2 - Build Support & TM Strategy

I hope you all had a safe and restful summer. Now that we are back to work and looking at the fourth quarter of 2008 (can you believe it), let's explore talent management (TM) and succession planning (SP) further.

I think we can all agree that talent management is a urgent issue given the challenges we face in recruiting, retaining and developing necessary strength in our organizations. The exodus of talent in the near future threatens to create a huge demographic shift. In the last newsletter I asked, "But what should you do if leaders don't see the relevance of talent management?" In this newsletter I will give you some suggestions.

- ✓ First, start small. Create success with one highly visible problem. Collect anecdotes and data from a success in dealing with the TM problem. Use every channel of communication available to you. Emphasize the value and ROI of TM as you have demonstrated by this case.
- ✓ Second, build a following. Start with your most powerful internal customer. Work to satisfy their needs and interests. Expand gradually beyond that client.
- ✓ Third, insert information about TM in company publications. Build lower level support if top management is hard to reach.
- ✓ Fourth, demonstrate how TM can avert problems. Use TM stories to show how short, medium and long term problems can be averted. Use the current stories and data to show how TM activities can rectify issues and concerns.

You will have to work on building support for TM and SP over time; often many years. Your strategy will pay off if you are persistent, diligent and patient.

Get Necessary Resources

The ultimate commitment of management to any plan is the extent to which they allocate resources. The process of budgeting is about converting objectives into resources necessary to achieve success.

TM should come from long term strategic objectives. It is important to look beyond annual budgeting horizons and consider several questions:

- What is going to be the complete cost of achieving your strategic plans over the full time of your efforts; 3-5 years for example?
- What estimates can be made now of the company's financial position over that time period?
- Will the TM effort be affected heavily or not so heavily by cut backs and growth?
- Would it make more sense to put higher priorities on some objectives in early budgeting? If so, what should be emphasized sooner or later?

I realize that some of you struggle and live with imposed budgets. However, most organizations allow at least some negotiation. If you can speak to some TM success and partner with operating departments in your budgeting efforts, you will be more successful.

Structural Changes Impact Talent Management

But what about resistance? Assuming support already exists for TM and SP generally, why are people resistant? Think about possible causes.

Let's look at "Structure." Structure can constrain TM. Structure refers to a way of organizing work to ensure control and facilitate goal related behavior.

- First, structure implies allocation of job tasks and responsibilities.
- Second, structure affects reporting relationships, how many and what types of people are grouped together. The numbers and types of people affect communication, how close they feel, and how creative they are.
- Third structure affects the level of conflict in the group or organization. That is, conflict comes from the level of inter-dependence and differing perceptions of goals.

Any change in structure can create new learning needs as well as conflict. There are several reasons:

- Reallocation of job duties creates a need to train appropriately for job tasks and responsibilities.
- As relationships between jobs change, employee education based on prior career paths is affected.
- As old work groups are split up, new ones are formed and people find that they have to learn new tasks, interactions with new people, and how to deal with the new groups goals.
- Finally, as duties are shifted, work groups will begin to serve internal and external customers in new ways.

This effect on TM is like "52 pickup." Throwing all the cards in the air creates a bit of chaos and not all changes can be predicted nor are all changes desirable. Reorganizations of any kind can open up new career paths as old ones fade away. The important point is that any organization restructuring creates new learning needs before, during and after the change.

Structural Changes Require a Review of Talent Management

Structural changes require a review of TM practices. For example a shift from a centralized organization to a decentralized organization creates the need to review TM practices. There are many alternatives:

- Decentralize the TM development. In effect eliminating corporate level department.
- Create formal or informal liaisons in each region who communicate regularly with the centralized TM function.
- Separate the duties of the TM function. Create small groups of itinerant TM experts that rove from site to site in each region.
- Create a field operations chief at the corporate level who travels to the regions reporting back to corporate TM.
- Create a TM function within each region or division. They would interact with one person operations in the field and with corporate TM.

Additional areas of TM practices review based on structural changes include:

- Organization structure of project or matrix reporting relationships
- Structuring of assignment experiences
- Sequencing of learning and TM experiences
- Reviewing reward systems
- Communicating TM strategy and tactics

Developing Functional Strategies for Developing Talent

TM strategy for developing talent should be part of overall HR management and planning because building individual competencies are critically related to the business plan, or should be. TM is part of ensuring that the right people are in the right places at the right times and that they possess the right skills. Within HR's and the organization's strategy you might also develop functional strategies. Below are the five components to consider of overall functional efforts. They differ in purpose because they focus on differing areas of change:

- Organization Development: a long term effort for changing the culture of an organization or group.

- External Development: a long term effort to improve the relationship between the business and external stakeholders, i.e. the public, customers, vendors, etc.
- Employee Development: a long term effort for matching competencies of a work group and their responsibilities.
- Education: medium term efforts to help people achieve career objectives, stay current with changes in their profession, and gain additional or new personal insights.
- Training: a short term effort to help employees meet their responsibilities.

Each function is an element in your unified approach to TM. Each is a layer that distinctively contributes to the overall HR and TM strategy. Yet, each has distinct attributes from the other functions and can be guided by their own objectives, policies and activities.

The important aspect to remember is that you are working to unify and deliver a cohesive TM process. Your TM plan must support the overall business and operational strategy and blend with the mid and long term goals of your business. That is how you will get support for talent management and succession planning.

Thanks for reading. See you next newsletter.

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